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Muskogee

SOCIAL ORGANIZATION

THE HOUSEHOLD

592 Geographical, economic, consanguineal, and religious factors all entered into the evolution of the Creek confederacy. They took concrete shape in the household, family, clan, phratry, clan moiety, town, and town moiety.

[562] Women owned the houses and were permanent occupants, moving only as new houses were built for them or as the entire group to which they belonged migrated seasonally or permanently. These houses were also the homes (hûti) of the nearest male blood relations, those whom the women called "uncles," "brothers," and "sons." They, [591] however, normally went to the homes of their wives as soon as they were married, besides spending much time in the public square and in the tcokofa. On the other hand, aged men, whose wives had [888] died and whose children were grown up and scattered, might come back to the homes of their childhood, or, as frequently happened, they might spend their last years moving from house to house among the women of their own clan connection—never, however, among those of the clan connection of their wives.

A typical Creek home would therefore consist of a man and woman, their children, one or more sons-in-law, some grandchildren, some aged or dependent individuals of the same clan group, and perhaps an [597] orphan or two or one or more individuals taken in war. These last, though somewhat looked down upon at first, were rapidly assimilated with the tribe which had captured them and soon came to be appre- [567] ciated in accordance with their proven merit. There was nothing that may properly be called a slave system among the Indians of the Southeast. Where polygamy existed the wives were generally own [595] sisters and usually inhabited the same house, though there were cases in which a man had wives living in two or more distinct houses.

THE FAMILY

GENERAL REMARKS

601 A fairly accurate clue to the Muskogee conception of the "family" is furnished by the terms of relationship. These consist of a number of root words, not now analyzable, and words formed from these which it is natural to assume are secondary in importance. Many terms are of the "classificatory" type, covering a number of individuals who to our way of thinking bear quite distinct relations to the speaker. Theorists have tried to maintain that this collective use preceded the special or individual use, but so far as the Muskogee are concerned the evidence points to the special application as having been, if not the original, at least the typical or primary. Secondary or derivative

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614 had once been laid aside. According to one writer the Wind clan could take them up an indefinite number of times; according to another, four times. This privilege is well remembered. A single writer adds that people of the Bear clan were allowed to take the clubs up twice, but I have been able to learn nothing definite upon the subject from the living Indians. Local privileges connected with the busk ceremonial were, of course, enjoyed by other clans.[a]

In other parts of America clan distinctions are indicated by means of face paintings or tattooings. With the Creeks, however, most of the latter seem to have had to do with war honors. I was told that members of the Raccoon clan painted circles about their eyes, but according to others this was done merely by doctors as a sign that they were able to see in the dark. Paintings used to indicate the towns of the persons using them will be considered presently.[42a]

Another source of information regarding the position of clans in the tribe is still to be tapped, but in order to do this we must first set forth a description of the Creek ceremonial or busk ground, the religious and social center of every Creek community of consequence.

DISTRIBUTION WITH REFERENCE TO THE LAND AND THE TOWN

174 361 614 Both the Creeks and the Texas-Alabama have told me that anciently clans lived apart, and in a Creek story of the origin of corn they are represented as scattered about in a number of different camps. Whether or not the major clans are descended from bodies of people which once lived in separate towns and lacked exogamy the local separation of the clans until very late times is an undeniable fact. I may note here the assertion of one of my oldest and best informants to the effect that in olden times the clans were not exogamous, but that upon one occasion a council was held and it was determined that afterwards they should be considered such. This is interesting as marking the native recognition of such a possibility, not as proving that the change actually took place. The Creek towns in the times when we begin to have knowledge of them consisted of a succession of villages or neighborhoods scattered through the woods and along the streams, and connected by a network of trails. The unit of such a town consisted of a group of houses owned by women of one clan and occupied by themselves, their husbands, and their young children. In practice it worked out something like this. A man, assisted by other members of his family or clan, might build a house in a new situation and clear the usual yard by hoeing up the surface weeds and grass for a considerable space about it. Now, when one of his daughters married her husband, drawn from some other, perhaps distant, locality, would build another house on part of the same

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[a] Cf. also Millett, Mém., p. 255.

[42a] See p. 240.

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cleared space or in the immediate neighborhood where the pair would set up housekeeping. As his other girls married this process was repeated. When the children grew up the girls would continue to occupy the ancestral dwellings, or others erected for them in the neighborhood, while the boys would marry elsewhere. A man might erect and pay for a house and call it "my house," but it was to all intents and purposes the property of his wife. "My house" was a term applied by the Chickasaw to his clan as well as to his habitation.[88] By a Creek male the word which has been translated into English as "home" (hûti) was not bestowed upon the house in which he and his wife lived, even though he might have built it himself, but on the houses in which lived the women of his clan. A woman's hûti, or "home," was indeed her home in our understanding of the term, except that the houses occupied by other women of the same clan were also her homes, but a man's hûti was not usually where he spent most of his adult life, but the home of his mother and the other women of his clan. In case a stranger visited the town and made known to what clan he belonged it was the duty of a man married into that clan to invite him to his house. In this case, although neither he nor his wife had set eyes on the man before, he would say to him "Come to your home (hûti)." This duty of hospitality toward a fellow-clansman often brought men outside of the family proper under the same roof, whether they were welcome or not. Sometimes an old man whose children were grown up, or who for any reason was alone in the world, would travel about from one to another of the houses of his female kin. He would say, "Well, I am going to my home," and make for the house of someone who had never seen him before. In later times this struck the young people as very presumptuous, but it was the old law. In the days before there were hotels, restaurants, old peoples' homes, insurance, etc., it was a very convenient device. It not only served to provide for the old, infirm, and indigent, but enabled the adventurous to travel and see more of the world than would otherwise be possible.

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The best early account of the arrangement of a Creek village and its dwellings, including also the position of the ceremonial grounds with reference to them, is given by Bartram, and I herewith append it along with the sketch accompanying (fig. 1). He says:

"The general position of the Chunk-Yard and Public Buildings of the Creeks, in respect to the dwellings of the Indians themselves, is shown in the following engraved plan:

"*A* is the Rotunda; *B*, the Public Square; *C*, the grand area or Chunky-Yard. The habitations of the people are placed with considerable regularity in streets or ranges, as indicated in the plan.

[88] Adair, Hist. Am. Inds., p. 17.

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342 household. Sometimes the house had a porch in front, as is usually the case at the present day. The corncrib was in one part of the yard, it did not matter which, and, as in the case of the Creeks, houses were also put up there for married daughters of the house owner. His sons went elsewhere to live with their wives. When the husband of one of these daughters killed a deer he would send some of the meat to his father-in-law, but the several families did not cook at one fire or live in any sort of communism.

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SEATING IN THE CEREMONIAL GROUNDS

171 361 342 344 622 When we consult the narratives of the De Soto expedition we find that they speak as if it were usual to find artificial mounds in the center of Indian settlements, the mounds sometimes bearing buildings. Garcilasso has the following to say regarding these:

"The town and the house of the cacique Ossachile were like those of all the other caciques of Florida. Therefore, without making a particular description of this place and this house, it seems proper to give only a general idea of all the capitals and all the houses of the chiefs of the country. I will say then that the Indians endeavor to place their towns upon elevated places. But because, in Florida, they rarely meet this sort of place where they can find the necessary conveniences to build, they raise themselves eminences in this manner. They choose a place where they bring a quantity of earth which they elevate into a kind of platform, two or three pikes high; the top of which is capable of containing ten or twelve or fifteen or twenty houses to lodge the cacique with his family and all his retinue. They then trace, at the bottom of this elevation, a square place conformable to the extent of the village which they would make; and around this place the most important persons build their dwellings. The common people lodge in the same manner; and thus they all environ the house of their chief. In order to ascend to it they draw, in a straight line, streets from top to bottom; each one fifteen or twenty feet wide, and unite them to each other with large posts, which enter very deep into the earth and which serve for walls to these streets. Then they make the stairs with strong beams which they put across, and which they square and join in order that the work may be more even. The steps of these stairs are seven or eight feet wide; so that horses ascend and descend them without difficulty. However, the Indians steepen all the other sides of the platform, with the exception of the stairs, so that they cannot ascend to it; and the dwelling of the chief is sufficiently strong."[68]

Garcilasso's figures frequently need to be divided by from 5 to 10, but there may very well have been some such structure as this since we know that the houses of the Natchez chiefs were elevated on

[68] Shipp's Garcilasso, pp. 360-361.

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From what Adair tells us[14a] it would seem that the stones used in playing the chunkey game were town property.

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The house, and probably the necessary household furniture, belonged to the wife, the tools made and used by the husband to him, and thus they were vested in different clan groups and some of them probably went to entirely different persons at the death of the owners. In early times such a large part of a man's personal property was buried with his corpse that not much was left for heirs to quarrel over. Bartram says that the first selection from whatever was left was made by the head wife of the deceased, the remainder being divided between his other wives and his children.[15] This may have been true in certain special cases but there is reason to doubt that it represented a custom common in earlier times. Says Eakins:

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"The descent of property is fixed. It is willed as the parents please. But if no will has been made, the property reverts to the children. But in case of a marriage with a widow, with children, her property reverts to her children by her first husband. The eldest son is entitled only to an equal portion with the rest. A written will is binding. A verbal will, established by two responsible persons, is valid also. If there has been no other disposition made of the medal, it goes to the eldest son. In former times, all relics were taken possession of by the deceased sister's eldest son. But now they are the subject of legacy as other property."[16]

This statement dates, of course, from a comparatively late period in the history of the Creek Indians, about the year 1850. The same authority states just above that anciently all property descended in the female line—indeed, he implies as much in the quotation just given—and there is every reason to believe that this is correct. It is confirmed by Gregg.[17]

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As to the lands of the confederacy outside of these town areas we may probably rely upon the following statement, also by Bartram:

"Every individual inhabitant has an equal right to the soil and to hunt and range over this region, except within the jurisdiction of each town or village, which I believe seldom extends beyond its habitations and planting grounds. Perhaps the *Uches* are to be excepted. They claim an exclusive property, by right of a contract; but though they sometimes put the Creeks in mind of this privilege, when their hunters make too free with their hunting grounds, yet the dispute seldom goes further, as the Confederacy are cautious of offending the Uches, and yield to their common interest and safety."[18]

[14a] See p. 426.
[15] Bartram, Travels, p. 514.
[16] Schoolcraft, Ind. Tribes, vol. I, p. 283.
[17] Gregg, Commerce of the Prairies, in Thwaites, Early Western Travels, vol. 20, p. 317.
[18] Bartram in Trans. Am. Eth. Soc., vol. III, p. 23.

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When they have eaten and drank together, they return home by sun-rise, and thus finish their solemn Yah-ah.

"Although a widow is bound, by a strict penal law, to mourn the death of her husband for the space of three or four years; yet, if she be known to lament her loss with a sincere heart, for the space of a year, and her circumstances of living are so strait as to need a change of her station—and the elder brother of her deceased husband lies with her, she is thereby exempted from the law of mourning, has a liberty to tie up her hair, anoint and paint herself. . . .

"The warm-constitutioned young widows keep their eye so intent on this mild beneficent law, that they frequently treat their elder brother-in-law with spirituous liquors till they intoxicate them, and thereby decoy them to make free, and so put themselves out of the reach of the mortifying law. If they are disappointed, as it sometimes happens, they fall on the men, calling them *Hoobuk Wakse*, or *Skoobále*, *Hassé kroopha*, 'Eunuchus praeputio detecto, et pene brevi;' the most degrading of epithets."[389]

A class of prostitutes existed among the southern Indians, composed of those who had committed adultery and had been cast off by their husbands, and those who for any other reason had become outcasts. Such women are said to have been the only ones to paint their faces. It was among them that many of the temporary marriages already spoken of were contracted.

It is hard to explain where Milfort got the idea that a Chickasaw widow was buried alive with her husband, for which there is not the slightest evidence outside of his own testimony.[390] It is not impossible, however, that he derived it in some manner from the ancient Natchez custom which applied only to widows of members of the nobility or Suns. Some color is lent to this suggestion by the fact that the Natchez and Chickasaw were more or less mixed together in the Chickasaw country and among the Upper Creeks. But neither with the Natchez were widows buried *alive;* they were first strangled.

DIVISION OF LABOR BETWEEN THE SEXES

Jackson Lewis, one of my oldest and best informants, said, "In ancient times men and women were almost like two distinct peoples." In fact the old habitations usually comprised two or more buildings in one of which the woman spent most of her time while her husband occupied the other and entertained there his male friends. To the present day this division is kept up in one form or another. Sometimes there are two small buildings with an open porch between; sometimes two rooms end to end with open fireplaces at the opposite ends. In Plate 7, *a*, is shown a typical Seminole house in Oklahoma

[389] Adair, Hist. Am. Inds., pp. 189-190.

[390] Milfort, Mém., p. 286.

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as it appeared in 1912. This was largely because it was thought that to sleep much with women enervated a man and incapacitated him as a warrior.[20] Adair says that in their town houses the women were separated from the warriors, and were merely allowed to sit at each side of the entrance "as if they were only casual spectators,"[21] and anciently they had no seats on the square ground. Among the Chickasaw six old beloved women were the only participants in the annual ceremony.[22]

Regarding the labors of women the last mentioned writer declares: "The women are the chief, if not the only, manufacturers; the men judge that if they performed that office, it would exceedingly depreciate them."[23] In fact women anciently, in addition to the indoors work of the house, made all of the pottery and basketry, and did all of the spinning and weaving of bison hair, mulberry bark, etc. The initial preparation of skins was sometimes performed by men, but most of the subsequent work upon it fell to the women. They made drying frames and dried peaches and other fruits upon them, and they of course pounded the corn and did the cooking.

The principal occupations of the men were hunting, ball playing, war, and rites connected with the use of medicine and ceremonial affairs. They built the houses, the corncribs, and the structures belonging to the square ground, felled trees, made canoes and mortars, drums, pipes, calumets, ball sticks, and of course in olden times the axes and the arrows, bows, war clubs, and most of the other articles used in hunting and war. When hunting at a distance from home they cut up the meat, loaded it on horses, and brought it back. It is evident that their labors amounted to considerable in the aggregate, although they were not so evenly sustained throughout the year as those of women. The smaller garden plots were cared for almost exclusively by women, but the town fields were tended by individuals of both sexes, and Bartram says that "there are not one-third as many females as males seen at work in their plantations; for, at this season of the year, by a law of the people, they do not hunt, the game not being in season till after their crops or harvest is gathered in, so the males have little else with which to employ themselves."[24] Later on in the season the same writer tells us that the labor falling upon women was harder.

"In the hunting season, that is in autumn and winter, the men are generally out in the forests, when the whole care of the house falls on the women, who are than obliged to undergo a good deal of labor, such as cutting and bringing home the winter's wood, which they toat on their back or head a great distance, especially those of the ancient large towns, where the commons and old fields extend some

[20] Swan in Schoolcraft, Ind. Tribes, vol. v, p. 272. [21] Ibid., p. 422.
[22] Adair, Hist. Am. Inds., p. 121. [23] Bartram in Trans. Am. Eth. Soc., vol. III, p. li.
[24] Ibid., pp. 26-27.